

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

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Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney and the Tigers host Maryland today at Memorial Stadium.

Tigers restoring roar to Death Valley with home win streak

CLEMSON — During Tommy Bowden's 10-plus season run at Clemson, Memorial Stadium became a rather inviting place.

Bowden went 45-17 in home games, losing at least two home games in at least six seasons; his last home loss, a 20-17 upset at Maryland's hands, featured the Tigers outgaining the Terrapins 372-295 and blowing a 17-6 halftime lead.

Four years later, that sometimes-sleepy, sometimes-porous environment has changed, and it is a big reason why Clemson is closing in on its second consecutive 10-win season.

As Maryland (4-5, 2-3 ACC) visits No. 10 Clemson for a 3:30 p.m. game televised by ESPNU, the Tigers (8-1, 5-1) are on the verge of an impressive feat.

A win over the Terrapins would mark the Tigers' 12th consecutive home victory, setting an all-time Clemson record.

The roar has been restored to Death Valley, and coach Dabo Swinney credits an orange-clad fan base.

"I'm proud of the consistency we've been able to play with at home, and a big part of that is

TUNE IN

Maryland at Clemson, 3:30 p.m., Memorial Stadium. **ESPNU**

our fans," Swinney said. "Over this run we've had at Death Valley, the life has come back into this stadium. The fans are a huge part of it. Win after win, the crowd has been awesome. I hope we have another great crowd Saturday and I'd be surprised if we didn't."

Through four home games, Clemson is averaging 80,500 fans per game, nearly 3,000 above 2011's average of 77,959. With N.C. State and South Carolina also on the docket, it is on pace to be the best home season since 2007, when an average of 81,355 fans packed into Memorial Stadium.

With the WestZone addition, the stadium's official capacity is listed at 80,301; the all-time best single season average is 81,750 in 1988.

"We get the opportunity to finish our last three games at home," said junior quarterback Tajh Boyd. "One of the things we pride ourselves on is winning at home. If we want to be an elite team we

have to continue to win at home, continue to try and change the culture and try and be a dominant team continuously."

A star-crossed Maryland team limps into Clemson today. The Terrapins have lost four quarterbacks to season-ending injuries — three of which were torn anterior cruciate ligaments. They've turned to freshman Shawn Petty, a converted linebacker.

A spread offense became an option-based attack with short screens. Petty completed nine of 18 passes for 115 yards and a touchdown, as well as two fumbles and an interception in a 33-13 loss to Georgia Tech, adding 24 yards on 17 carries.

Maryland coach Randy Edsall said Petty got more comfortable as the game went along and settled down.

"We've got a really good feel for what Shawn can do and how much he can handle, so we'll have a game plan put together that takes advantage of his skills and then also combines what we know we can do with the other players that we have on offense," Edsall said. "And again, I know — we

know how much we can give him and how much we can go into the game with, and that's what we'll do, and I think he'll play better having a game under his belt."

Led by senior defensive tackle Joe Vellano — who Swinney joked "has been there for 10 years" — Maryland's defense will offer a stiff challenge to a high-flying Clemson offense which ranks in the top 10 nationally in total offense, scoring offense and passing offense and has scored at least 37 points in eight consecutive games, an ACC record.

The Terrapins rank 11th nationally in total defense, 18th in rushing defense and 20th in passing defense; Swinney says their defense is "probably as good as we've played."

"We just have to continue to grow," Boyd said. "This is not going to be an easy game by any means, they're going to come fired up and have a great defense. It's another challenge for us. We look forward to challenges, accepting it and growing from it."

A year ago, Maryland built a 35-17 third-quarter

lead in College Park before Clemson rallied for a 56-45 win, the second-biggest comeback in program history; receiver Sammy Watkins piled up 345 all-purpose yards.

Boyd expects the Terps' memories will be long.

"They're going to come in here fired up," he said. "They were leading us by 18 last year and I'm sure they felt like they let us slip by and they're going to come into this game with a chip on their shoulder. We've just got to come into this prepared for them and prepared for everything they bring."

Clemson is a 31-point favorite, but that doesn't seem to matter to the Tigers, who talk consistently of playing to a self-imposed standard.

"That's where things are starting to change," Boyd said. "We want to play to our best level possible. If that's against a JV team, whoever it's against, it's one of those deals where you've got to be the best team, the best players you can be. We put a lot of work into this offseason, preparing for the season. We want to go out there and let the world see it."

MARYLAND BREAKDOWN

THE GOOD

The Terrapins feature a stout defense which Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said could be the best his team has faced all season. Maryland allows 301.6 yards per game (11th-best nationally) and 110.1 yards rushing per game (18th nationally). Senior defensive tackle Joe Vellano is one of the ACC's top defensive linemen, with 53 tackles, six sacks and 14 tackles for loss; Swinney joked this week that "he's been there for 10 years." The Terps' defensive line will challenge an improving Clemson offensive line; Maryland has 25 sacks as a team, tied with N.C. State for the ACC's best. There are questions behind it; Maryland will be playing without linebacker Demetrius Hartsfield, its leading tackler (with 78), who tore his ACL in last week.

THE BAD

At this point, coach Randy Edsall must be wondering who he angered to deserve the unreal, cursed string of bad injury luck his team has endured. The Terrapins are on their fifth quarterback of the season — freshman Shawn Petty, a converted linebacker who ran an option-based offense against the Yellow Jackets. All four of his predecessors are out for the season, three of them with ACL tears. To make matters worse, Maryland announced Thursday that freshman receiver Stefon Diggs and freshman tailback Wes Brown will miss the game with ankle injuries. Diggs is one of the ACC's most dynamic talents; he has 43 receptions for 721 yards, and his six receiving scores account for half of Maryland's total. Brown is the Terps' leading rusher, with 90 carries for 382 yards and two scores.

THE SKINNY

Clemson and Swinney have talked incessantly about playing to their own standard and not playing down to an opponent, a theory which will be tested today. The Terrapins are as injury-riddled as any team in America, with 26 players listed on their injury report. Clemson has a far superior offense, and its defense has improved steadily over the last month. The Tigers are trying to stay in the ACC race and keeping their hopes alive for an at-large BCS bid. A large homecoming crowd should provide the necessary energy, and Clemson will handle the business in front of it today.

By Greg Wallace